

Angeles Issues Summary – Trails/Recreation

Objectors:

- Evan Sollberger

Summary:

In general, the Objector disagrees with Angeles' decision for new Recommend Wilderness (RW) in the Fish Creek area without Backcountry Non-Motorized (BCNM) corridors that would allow for future mountain bicycle access. The objector indicates the desire for more mountain biking opportunities, however, current use by mountain bicyclists is very low.

Review Team Analysis:

Increased management complexity from boundary miles would require additional boundary signing, add non-suitable uses into areas zoned for RW, and increase the potential for resource management issues such as invasive weeds.

The ROD states “Although Alternative 2 provided narrow BCNM corridors through the Fish Canyon IRA that would have maintained mountain bike use as a suitable activity, after reviewing the comments on the Draft SEIS I decided that the more appropriate future condition for the entire area would be to manage it as RW as proposed in Alternative 2a. The many miles of additional boundary these corridors would have introduced would have made management of the zones much more difficult. My decision to select Alternative 2a changes the zoning associated with approximately 20 miles of existing trails and 4 miles of existing road (Sawtooth Road) from LUZs where bicycles are currently suitable, to RW, where bicycles are not suitable” (Angeles NF Draft ROD, pp. 4-5).

“Costs of trail maintenance increase in RW, however, mechanized equipment and motorized maintenance equipment may be used in RW so long as the wilderness character is not affected. Recreational opportunities are currently limited by the poor condition of trails in the area. Maintenance of the trails could provide better access for activities such as bicycling, hiking and horseback riding, primitive camping, nature and scenic viewing from adjacent roads, hunting and educational and leisure group outings. Several of the intermittent creeks and springs provide pools deep enough for swimming, wading, and water play in spring and early summer.” (FSEIS, Appendix 2, pg. 4).

The ROD states, “A wide range of opportunities for mountain bike use, basically the entire Forest road and trail systems, remain unchanged”(Angeles NF Draft ROD, pp. 4-5). The FSEIS states, “There would be no change to the current level of public access on the existing road and trails” and contrarily states, “Alternative 2a would affect mountain biking opportunities in the Fish Canyon and Barker Valley IRAs” (FSEIS, pp. 256-257). Appendix 2 identifies mountain bike use of the trails as being low and the demand for wilderness is currently being met (FSEIS,

Appendix 2, pp. 6-7). The Golden Eagle Trail was kept available for future mountain bike use by adjusting RW boundaries during the FEIS planning process. This trail currently is the most popular trail in the area for mountain biking when compared to the Fish Canyon and Burnt Peak Trails (FSEIS Appendix 2, pg. 6),

Alternatives 2 and 2a should result in beneficial effects to toads. Effects include fewer impacts to individuals within the occupied IRAs as compared to Alternative 1 due to more restrictions on motorized access and mechanized use (FSEIS, pg. 161). Motorized or mechanized recreational opportunities can be provided outside RW now and into the future, but fragmented habitat and long term scenic impacts are much harder to reverse (Angeles ROD, pg. 3). Additional statistics on use are not available. The condition of the trail being primitive, grown over and difficult to find is an indication the level of use is very low.

The benefits of designating this area as RW go beyond just the ecological benefits or the restriction of future use for mountain bikes. These combined IRA's comprise the largest available block of contiguous, relatively undisturbed habitat on the Angeles National Forest that is not already designated as wilderness. The addition of RW areas outside the IRA's, and the elimination of narrow BCNM corridors along existing trails in Alternative 2a will enhance manageability by reducing the overall number of boundary miles. The ecological benefits of preserving and recognizing this unique resource outweigh a loss of some current and future recreational opportunities, and the modest increase in costs of managing lands as wilderness (Angeles ROD, pg. 3).

REMEDY(S) PROPOSED BY OBJECTORS

"My formal comment letter, Letter #8550 specifically requested that Fish Canyon Trail and Burnt Peak Trail be excluded from Recommended Wilderness to preserve mountain bike access and connectivity from Liebre Mountain and Sawmill Mountain to Cienga Campground and Castaic Lake State Recreation Area." (Objection letter, pg. 3)

INSTRUCTIONS BEING CONSIDERED

An errata to the FSEIS to remove the statement, "There would be no change to the current level of public access on the existing road and trails".